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THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FORCES ON DESIGN
IN AMERICA

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by

Edward J. Logue

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Challenging but not cheerful is the way I would describe the assignment of preparing a paper on the impact of political and social forces on design in America.

Though normally of an affirmative cast of mind, I find myself compelled to file a rather negative report. Although in America today we probably have more current examples of individual design than the rest of the world put together, the quality of the average product is far lower than we like to admit. And there are many who would claim that we also lead the world in the production of raucous junk (a baneful by-product of our affluence).

Political and social forces have contributed to this state of affairs, but in a negative and rather accidental way. The architectural profession as an organized group has not itself had the impact on design that we might expect it would have had. As the only politician in this Princeton gathering (albeit the non-elective type) I am not hereto either define design or bedevil the architects. I consider their calling one of the highest. I salute the best of them as our time's most

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significant artists. But they are also businessmen and men of affairs, and it is not only the good ones whose designs become buildings. We must try to help them understand both how important they are as a group and what are some of the political and social responsibilities their importance indicates they should assume.

When we look behind the best of current design and inquire how it came to be commissioned, what do we find? Occasionally an organized process deliberately seeking an outstanding result. Now and then a superbly educated taste. Often a well informed friend. Often, too, chasing a whim or following a fashion. Not quite the way computers are selected or new products prepared.

If the story behind the success story is that unpredictable, it should help prepare us for the sharp fall off in quality when lady luck, or whatever, is not with it.

When we look at the ugliness which our economy creates so casually and indeed cheerfully, is it any wonder that we are rendered numb and helpless? Else why does Peter Blake have to shout so loud?

Our reference at this Princeton gathering is national, so we should attempt a national judgment. What is the problem?

Can we say that our standards of design in America today are high or low, or good or bad? Would it perhaps be more accurate to say that ours is a country which today shows too many signs of having no national awareness of design at all, good or bad?

It was not always so. As a nation we began by creating attractive communities harmoniously and spaciouly laid out. Few human settlements anywhere on the globe can match the felicitous appearance of the small New England town. The common, or green, the stately house, aspiring churches, solid town halls and plain schools have even today a beauty, unity and order which command not only admiration and respect but call forth a not entirely nostalgic yearning.

The political and social forces in pre-Civil War communities operated at a pace and with an intimacy which made a decent respect for the opinions of one's neighbors the strong element in design. It was possible to be individual and different without being strikingly, clashingly so. Evidence of that era of neighborliness in design abounds still today and not just in New England. But obviously something went wrong. We moved from a higher to a lower standard as progress took other more compelling forms.

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About one hundred years ago we began to experience large scale industrialization in a way that frequently demonstrated no more concern for human and social values than did the plantation system when it relied on slave labor.

Factory districts and tenement housing despoiled the cities. When the restless mobility which had spanned a continent turned loose inside a city it only gave rise to the bad habit of moving - moving away from an incipient slum to a new area. One of the great problems with our cities has been that we could always afford to move away, and there never seemed reason enough to want to stay. In this period of great industrial growth, as the eye of the nation seemed to go to move to the main chance, we apparently acquired the capacity to move around in our environment without seeing it.

There are few who would claim that in the period between the Civil War, our first great energizer, and World War II, which set off on another burst of energy that is still exploding, our national standards of design improved. The evidence is rather of gradual decline. Then the state of the mechanical and communications arts was such that the damage was done in a limited area in a limited way.

Things are different today. Our rate of physical development is such that each of us in his own lifetime has seen a nearby countryside despoiled by thoughtless growth and a once stable neighborhood ravaged by blight. The pace of change today makes us realize that ugliness can indeed engulf us. Yet how many of us are aware of what is being done to our environment? We have been taught to regard as important the nuances in design of each year's new model car, guaranteed to do everything except last, while buildings go up which will stay up for generations with no more concern about their importance as design than about who their janitor will be. The nicest people often seem to put up the worst buildings and not even know they are doing it.

Americans in the main today seem unaware visually, in any aesthetic sense, of their surroundings. How else would they put up with the ugly disorder which lines their main highways and most of their main streets? Catching the eye has become the prerogative of the outdoor advertising industry and the roadside stand rather than of the designer. We do not seem to have the strength or the will to say that there are some ways of promoting sales which are indecent.

What has our political system to do with all this? More than may appear. The New Deal put through a system of high

tax rates on upper bracket incomes in the name of "ability to pay". This tax policy has had many consequences, some good and some bad. One, entirely unsought, has been to aid in the spread of slums and the decline in the calibre of design in buildings built for profit. The effect of the New Deal sponsored high surtaxes on large personal incomes has been very simple. It has largely missed its mark. Few people pay the super bracket rates. Advice on tax avoidance has become a respected and sought after specialty in law and accountancy.

One of the most popular ways to avoid the high brackets is to play for capital gains. One of the standard capital gain devices is to buy property, provide minimum maintenance, drain off deductible depreciation allowances in cash at an accelerated rate, and when the depreciation is gone sell the property often to another fellow with the same noble instincts. Whoever would have thought that New Deal tax policy would be the slum landlord's best friend?

But that isn't all. As the New Deal tax policies help the spread of slums on the one hand, they also are actively at work insuring that buildings will be of minimum quality, that architects' commissions will be shaved and other corners cut and that concern for the environment will be minimized. Surely F.D.R. had no such goals in mind.

Here is how it works. The entrepreneur who puts together a new building often has to haggle for the site, the financing, the tenants, the contractor. He is inclined to tell the architect to give him something that will come in cheap, be painless to maintain, have the maximum ratio of net rentable area per floor, lots of glass, not look too different from the last one (and thereby provide an excuse to shave the fee).

These are important services and can earn a fat fee. However, the entrepreneur cannot afford a fee at the high surtax rates so he takes ownership instead. What better way to make him a responsible developer? The trouble is he already has figured out that he can make his fat fee by selling the fully rented building at a handsome capital gain to some conservative investor who does not want the bother of putting it together. Since the first owner has quick resale in mind from the beginning, he has only a minimum incentive to consider quality. To the conservative investor, if the income is assured, his main concern is satisfied. Pride in a building built to last and remain a good neighbor is not encouraged by this system of taxation.

In the case of FHA insured apartment buildings until quite recently the developer would have had to fight the dead weight of bureaucracy all the way to do anything of high standard. Very few found it worth the bother.

The political force for "liberal" tax policies in the thirties is thus having an unanticipated, unfortunate and unwanted side effect on design. And design being an amiable, pleasant thing that considers a lobby an entrance to a building does not know what to do about it and is not eager to learn.

Is it any wonder that design is so easily trampled on by political forces stampeding for something else?

I should point out before I go further what should be obvious. Neither our political system nor our politicians are malevolently or even consciously trying to make America ugly. They are in the main just not aware of the consequences of their acts. In this respect, in fairness to them, they are no better and no worse than many a corporation head or university president.

Unawareness of the difference between good and bad design is all too common among that key group of American executives, whether businessmen, educators or politicians, who make the key design decision - who is going to draw the plans. Politicians as a group are no more or less aware of design than their fellow executives. However the political executive makes his choice it does have its impact on design.

If we are considering the impact of political forces on design it will be well to consider in this respect the formal political process itself. This formal political structure focuses on conventions, campaigns as well as on the period in

office. It is a restless system and one at which all manner of political pressures or forces are directed. We are familiar with them as capital and labor, the farm bloc, etc. The N.A.M., the A.F.L.-C.I.O., the Farm Bureau, the N.A.A.C.P. and hundreds more routinely make their views known to the politicians and in return seek commitments as to policy positions of direct concern to themselves. It is said that promises of help and even threats of retaliation are sometimes employed. This is one well established way in which design could operate as a political force. Yet the evidence is that design as a force is not in the picture, however much room there may be for individual initiative.

Someday it may occur to the organized designers to offer a platform plank to a political party suggesting that good design be established as an appropriate national objective. In the long platforms popular today they might be accommodated more quickly than we realize.

Will the day ever come when the designing profession will have the temerity to stand up to the candidates and ask them on what basis they propose to make their selections of architects for public work during a coming term? Is it perhaps fair to say that in the present day world of political forces an organized force for good design just does not exist?

There are certain political issues which need no sponsor to command the attention of the political system. Is design one of those? Let us see.

The United States has a national two party system carried on through quadrennial national conventions, national committees, national chairmen and national platforms. Without having claimed to search the record thoroughly, I believe I am safe in asserting that design has never been an issue in a national convention, never had a place on the agenda at a meeting of a national committee, never occupied a moment's thought in the mind of a national chairman, nor taken up as much as a line in a national platform.

There was one hopeful sign recently. Whether it was an aberration or not it is too soon to tell. The late Paul Butler, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee during most of the Eisenhower presidency, organized a Democratic Advisory Council (over the objections of the Congressional leadership) to provide a citizens' forum for debating the Democratic view on key national issues. The Council had a number of advisory committees, including one on urban and suburban problems headed by Mayor Richard C. Lee of New Haven.

Dick Lee's committee was an interesting collection of planners, professors and politicians. They prepared a report entitled "The State of Our Cities and Suburbs in a Changing America". Design managed several mentions. Although the 1960 Democratic platform contained the fullest statement to date of

the need for broader and more effective policies to remedy the defects in our physical environment, the question of design was approached only obliquely.

So much for the national party structure. Design, as a positive force, is just not in the picture. Or maybe the summer of 1964 holds some surprises.

The national party structure is duplicated at the local level. There are state conventions, state committees, state platforms and state chairmen. It is safe to make the national generalization about the state scene. Design is not to be found. Similarly at the local level in cities and towns, design is not a party matter, except occasionally as the scapegoat for high building costs.

In a word we have a vacuum. Yet politics like nature abhors a vacuum and design decisions are made. Our political system frequently does have a policy on design, the result of which often tends, perhaps unintentionally, to encourage mediocrity. Since our system of politics, more than the parliamentary ones, is as much personal as party, we must have a look at the role of the office holder on matters of design.

We might as well begin at the top with the President of the United States. Our presidency is the most influential office in the free world. Presidential interest and leadership has helped to focus attention on a variety of issues from peace to

war and poverty to plenty. In the galaxy of issues that have concerned our Presidents over time, design has seldom made the list. Thomas Jefferson was the first American president with a genuine personal appreciation of design, and to adopt a comment of President Kennedy's he may well have been the last.

One of the most exciting of our late President Kennedy's qualities was his marvelous capacity for continuing to educate himself in new fields while in the White House. Although matters of design had apparently not excited his interest too much before his election, there is much reason to believe that design may have been about to find in him its most important sponsor, friend and benefactor.

It is common-place in Washington to see that the city as a city is usually ignored by its most important resident. President Kennedy however had shown a keen interest in many ideas and programs for making Washington a better and handsomer place in which to live, work and visit. The preservation of Lafayette Square, the improvement of Pennsylvania Avenue were among his special projects plus getting rid of some of the "tempo" which disfigure the mall.

There were many more but incredibly enough the Public Buildings Service of the General Services Administration had even begun to move in the direction of the Foreign Buildings Office of the Department of State in consciously setting out to improve the

calibre of architects selected to do federal buildings in the United States. To be fair, the Republicans had made a modest start. We were getting ready to abandon the anomaly whereby you had to go abroad to see the best of our federal government's buildings, and a good domestic supply was being readied.

We can hope that President Johnson will also move in this same direction and we should certainly encourage him to do so. The presidency has such powers of leadership that we can all hope that one day soon our President will accept an appropriate invitation to address a national gathering on the subject of design and its role in creating a better America.

All federal elective power does not lie with the President. The impact of Senators and Representatives in influencing thought and giving importance to previously obscure public questions should never be underestimated. Although the doctrinaire liberal is often in too much of a hurry to see his solutions put into effect to care about their aesthetic quality and the conservative is often so cost conscious as to associate good designs with unnecessary frills, there is room for a man in the Congress to pause and ask some questions. To date the impact of the Congress on design in America is negligible.

One day perhaps some restless member of the Congress will get permission to set up a subcommittee perhaps of the Government

Operations Committee, to investigate such matters as:

How does GSA select its architects?

What do the AIA and the critics think of Federal design?

What do local planning and development agencies think of the Federal building's role in improving their cities?

Is FHA advancing good design or holding it back?

Did the Bureau of Public Roads ever have a waking moment's thought about urban design when it prepared the highway program ~~partal~~?

There might even be a colloquy on what constitutes good or bad design. Certainly there is scope for Congressional concern about design. The recent skirmish about the Capitol and environs indicates that the profession and the critics will speak up if given the proper opportunity and encouraged to make use of it.

At the level of the state legislature and the local council there may be less scope for inquiry but certainly any positive interest in achieving good design would be welcome.

The governor of a state has a very crucial role in the matter of design. Through his direct or indirect control over the selection of architects the governor usually has the decisive voice on how the image of his state will be shaped during his term of office. A governor can even intervene decisively in the matter of highway design if he is so moved. Not only public

office buildings, but state universities, colleges, hospitals and much more in the way of public work can be done routinely. It can be done with mediocrity or distinction depending on the will or whim of the governor.

More often than not, governors seem to be unaware of the importance of this power. The beauty of buildings is seldom a campaign issue, perhaps because a groundbreaking is as much as one term allows. The question of design gets decided for other reasons on other criteria. Very few states have a conscious policy about design let alone one of seeking to achieve the best. For lack of positive policy, politics still abhorring a vacuum, another kind of policy sometimes takes over.

In the cities the key man is the mayor. Several hundred mayors are quite important people in their communities, and their influence can be felt far beyond the confines of city hall. The important thing to know about mayors and design is that regardless of what the wide variety of city charters and ordinances may say, the mayor usually has effective control over the selection of architects.

The architectural standards established for city schools, libraries, police and fire stations, parks, playgrounds and public squares can do much to set a standard for the community as a whole. Too often the opportunity is ignored. The mayor is

often unaware that his decision or his sanction of the decision of others may, as easily as not, condemn his city to still another display of mediocrity. In the suburbs, more frequently in school design, the picture is often brighter since the pressure for quality can be quite strong and even outweigh the suburban pressure toward conformity.

The direct impact a sensitive mayor can have on the appearance of his city is great. The indirect impact possible in a city with serious renewal, planning and zoning programs is enormous. But this is not my assignment at this conference - much as I like to talk about it. I like to think that the renewal programs in New Haven and Boston have been leaders in the area of design, but so have many others - San Francisco, Detroit and Philadelphia to mention a very few. The one public official who probably deserves more credit than any other for increased emphasis in good design in urban renewal is Urban Renewal Commissioner William L. Slayton. I know of no one else who has played a more important role.

It is my considered judgment, however, and I have had ten years to consider it, that of all our political figures the mayor is in the position to do the most good or the most harm in the matter of design, urban, civic, call it what you like. He is also about the last fellow anybody ever thinks of talking to seriously on this subject.

From inquiries I have made I would gather that the number of local societies of architects which have gone to their mayors with recommendations for positive policies on design is not much larger than the fingers on one hand. I would only count half for those local groups which try to inflict the competition approach wholesale.

With rare exceptions, neither the political parties nor the elected political leaders have any positive policy of endeavoring to achieve good design. Though it would appear that no design policy at all guides the selection of architects for public work, nonetheless architects are chosen by some criteria and those deserve examination.

Does the absence of positive standards at the top mean that the appointed department heads or bureaucrats are given a free hand? Now and then, but only now and then.

Does personal friendship, approval of previous work or a recommendation from a well placed source have any bearing? Quite a lot.

So far as I am aware, no survey has been taken on any large scale of how architects are chosen for commissions or for public works. Such a survey would be useful in suggesting ways in which selection procedures could be improved. One reason for selection sometimes found is based on campaign contributions. Here an explanatory word is necessary. A major and indeed alarming

defect in our political system, conceded by all observers, is the matter of campaign financing. Any closely fought campaign for an important office requires more cash than the personality of the candidate or the issues of the campaign will readily generate. The friends of the candidate, the party stalwarts, the momentarily enthusiastic, may start the campaign rolling. It is seldom enough to last until Election Day. Television is ravenous, newspaper lineage rates are fabulous, even the precinct workers like a days pay on election day. We all cluck cluck about the problem, but the candidate has to do something about it.

Let's assume he is on the right side of whatever issues you happen to be interested in. You care about them and you give a contribution. You and people like you are not enough to finance most of the hard fought campaigns.

The candidate finds that a very solid source of contributions are those who want to be his friends in office and share with him some of its responsibilities. Nothing wrong in that, most of the time, particularly if it is fully reported so everybody knows the score. It is common at every level of government. Every list of campaign contributors is full of people who have more than an intellectual interest in the outcome of the contest. I must admit that personally I draw the line at those who contribute to both sides.

The number and variety of people with a particular interest is something wondrous to behold. We do not have the space to list them all. Among them are those concerned with building and include contractors, engineers and architects. The architects and engineers have one thing in common. Their professional services are not made available on a bid price basis. Clearly the successful candidate must use some other criteria in making his choice.

How is a candidate once elected to know which one to pick? The professional societies usually offer him no responsible guidance. His education, wherever obtained, is unlikely to have prepared him to make a decision among architects on a professional or even a semi-professional basis. His prior experience only rarely will help him. All those interested are licensed and have brochures.

But what happens? The candidate or officeholder finds that some architectural firms are more friendly or responsible than others. They help him when he needs it most - in his struggle to obtain the office he now holds. The rest of the profession has no grounds for complaint because for all the record shows, this is the way it prefers the choice to be made.

The elected official getting ready for another go, the state committee financing a campaign, throws a fund raising dinner and asks its friends to take tables. Architects are usually found at such gatherings, some architects that :

The system has its merits and its demerits. I would suggest there is only one group that has no right to criticize it. That is the self-righteous architects who pretend to love their city or their state, and then either refuse to contribute or refuse to insist, publicly if necessary, that their profession press for a more desirable method of selection.

I do not pretend to know how widespread the practice is of selecting architects who have been helpful to the candidate or the party in the hour of utmost need. I have the impression that it is not entirely uncommon. Sometimes this process of rewarding your friends and their support works reasonably well, although it rarely produces work of distinction.

What concerns me is not the practice itself but what kind of design it can tend to produce. Since the contribution in effect comes out of a fixed fee, it must come out of the work if the contribution is a large one. Some architects are more willing to shave their fees in this manner than others. Such practice is hardly likely to yield the best result and conceivably can lead to a quite mediocre performance.

This system at all levels of government can help to establish mediocrity as the standard for design without anyone having consciously decided to do so. It can produce a kind of equation:

No public pressure for good design plus no public pressure for responsible campaign financing equals (or produces) mediocre public buildings.

Obviously there are exceptions to every rule in your town and in mine. I have had the good fortune to work with two outstanding mayors, Dick Lee in New Haven and John Collins in Boston, who in different ways have made enduring contributions to the cause of good design in America today. Though neither would have claimed to have batted a thousand, they both can be proud of what they have already accomplished. I am confident that each of you in the years ahead will want to visit their cities to see what they have accomplished. I also know that many others at this conference can add similar cheerful tidings to prove the cause is far from lost. However, I think it is clear that altogether too often the impact of political forces on design in America is negative rather than positive and by unintended consequence bad design can often result.

The question of responsibility for this state of affairs is one on which there is little agreement. It is perfectly fair to blame the parties and the politicians for they are customarily held to blame for every thing that is wrong in our political system. However, that does not help us much.

The more appropriate question perhaps is where does the responsibility lie for making it right?

I suggest that it lies first with the architects themselves. It is not unreasonable to ask them to do the minimum that any professional group should do - establish criteria for seeing that the public interest is protected in getting the best work they are capable of.

There are many ways that local, state and national societies can stimulate the various levels of government to consider and adopt standards of design and programs for selecting architects who can carry them out. Different methods will be appropriate in different circumstances.

The profession will grapple with the problem only reluctantly I fear. For one thing, architecture is the least rewarding of all the professions when it comes to repeat business. The architect who has a practice built merely on repeat clients is a rare one indeed. Moreover, the relatively small number of transactions (i.e. commissions) puts unusual stresses on the architect in obtaining work. These factors introduce a certain instability to the profession.

These problems of stability and security in dealing with any of its clients is an excuse for the profession. Architects must be willing to take up the cause of good public design first if they expect others to share their concerns. If the architects will take the lead, there is in nearly every community a group of civic minded people of otherwise diverse interests who will join in the effort if they see it being made. Many newspapers, but by no means all, have a latent interest in the subject which they are willing to have stimulated if the profession will show them the way.

Once the architects decide to lift themselves by their own bootstraps (for this is what it takes) they will find themselves seeking out all of the opinion makers and pressure groups and going to work on them. I think that for the profession this will produce surprisingly beneficial results. If I may say so, I think it will also improve the quality of architecture itself. I have the distinct impression, impossible to verify directly, that the present ignorance about standards outside the profession makes many practitioners do less than the best work they are capable of.

A stress on quality and a knowledge that the calibre of performance will be of far greater importance should help significantly in developing and refining talents which indifference has dulled.

It is time to treat of social forces and their impact on design in America. The term "social forces" is as broad as it is long. It may be best to take up a limited number of cases or types. We will be looking not for amorphous anonymous forces but ones which do or can have a significant impact.

In one sense at least the most important social force in America today is the business community. There are many ways of looking at the business community. From our point of view perhaps the most useful way to look at it is to see the one that may offer the most constructive possibilities for aid in improving design.

The business community generally has chosen the Chamber of Commerce as its most all embracing representative. On the national level the United States Chamber of Commerce has seemed to many to be a symbol of reaction. Even its warmest support would not claim that it was a force on matters of design. Many local Chambers follow in the same path.

However, it is important to note that many do not. A very large number of local chambers of commerce have interested themselves deeply in progressive programs for their communities in close partnership with the local governments. Of many outstanding examples the two I personally know best are Hartford,

Connecticut and Boston, Massachusetts. In these two fortunate cities the local Chambers have made quite clear their own deep interest in good design. Some architects and some critics may quarrel with the end result, but it seems to me that the above average design results in Constitution Plaza and the Boston Waterfront owe as much to the sensitivity of the chamber leaders as to any other source and probably more.

We can hope that local chambers all over the country will be encouraged to insist on high standards of design in local projects, both public and private. Awards, commendations, encouragement from prominent local businessmen can further good design in any community. The continuity of a chamber of commerce on the local scene against the often temporary character of the elected leadership creates a special opportunity for helping the elected official to resist the pressure for quick results regardless of design quality. The architects may surprise themselves at how useful an ally a chamber of commerce can be.

Individual business corporations are probably the most important kind of client architects have. In the post war period we have seen a remarkable improvement in the corporate climate for good design. This result has been achieved usually because of the determination of influential corporate executives

that the company have the best that modern design could offer. The amount of outstanding work commissioned by private corporations is encouraging indeed. The question we can fairly ask is whether the good example has had all the impact (social force) we might have hoped for. Although the success of these leaders has inspired some followers there is reason (on Park Avenue for instance) for believing that the followers were not really with it!

There is to date little evidence that the corporation which has chosen one path of outstanding design has become the strong advocate of higher standards that a convert might be expected to become. I believe such advocacy could accomplish much.

I know of one insurance company with a famous design by a famous firm which has held conferences on highways and other major public problems but so far as I know has never sponsored a conference on design in the special surroundings it has provided for itself. It might be fun to ask why.

I am inclined to say that the architectural profession should encourage satisfied clients who are occupying distinguished buildings to use them to show off great architecture. I pause for a moment realizing how hard it is for architects,

including the best ones, to speak well of one another. I have often tried to figure out why this is so, or at least has been so in my limited experience. I have asked the gentlemen themselves and never had a satisfactory explanation. I think it all became clearer to me the day I attended a jury session at Yale and watched the visiting critics cut and slice the students in front of their peers in a way which I could only conclude must leave scars. I digress, I admit, but I cannot help but feel that the ungenerous way architects too often have with one another may be more important than I first thought.

The corporate client is usually a client for just one building. What kind of social force is represented by the institutional lender, the bank or insurance company? The answer would appear to be that the lender is occasionally prepared to do interesting things for himself, but only rarely will he make a loan gladly on anything that represents a departure from established standards.

No one lender appears eager to break away and follow new leads or new standards. Perhaps the answer is for the lenders to run a symposium on design and face up to their hopes, fears and values. A collective self-analysis with the help of a few astringent critics might lead to a re-examination of the social

responsibilities and social opportunities which lending institutions have with respect to their environment. In the course of minimizing their risks most lenders have assumed that tampering with design is dangerous and imprudent. They should be given every incentive to explore the way that good design, not only for individual houses but for neighborhoods as a whole can change some of these assumptions.

Labor is a political or social force or both. If it is having any effect on design at the present time it has escaped me, other than the usual complaints about restrictive practices.

I will mention civil rights only briefly enough to say that design does not seem to enter into any manifesto I have seen. In fact design has not been positioned on the left, right or center of the political spectrum and probably will not be. This should mean it is a non-controversial subject!

Women are our largest minority, so large they have become a majority. They are singularly quiet on the subject of design and as long as the home making magazines continue to flourish are likely to remain so.

The universities and colleges have been neglecting a very important responsibility in the area of design. I am not referring to the education of architects. Though there may be room

for improvement, that work is being done at least adequately. Of equal importance to the training of architects is the visual education of the undergraduate. We have seen too often that the best educated and most sophisticated of men in all walks of life are unaware of design. I am not concerned only about the young men and women who will grow up to be important clients, though they obviously need preparation for this role. When we look around us and see how rapidly our visual environment is deteriorating we can see how much we miss an educated citizenry.

It is common in the undergraduate world of today to take courses in art and music, for example, or in literature or other aspects of the humanities not because they fit into a departmental major or aid in preparation for a chosen career, but because they help one to appreciate throughout life some aspects of culture that need study for understanding and enjoyment. However, it is only rarely that we find an undergraduate course in architectural appreciation which will stimulate the young to an informed awareness of the visual world around them.

I do not know what the situation is at Princeton today but things have improved at Yale since my undergraduate days there. In my time the late John Phillips taught a course

formally known as "Early American Silver" and popularly known as "Pots and Pans". It was a gut, of course, and yet those who took it came to have an appreciation of early American silver and many became collectors. Today Vincent Scully presides over a survey course on design which educates Yale undergraduates about the visual world around them. Enthusiastic reports I have heard make me hope that it will produce many collectors of good design.

Yale undergraduates of course are getting an unparalleled visual education today just by walking around the university campus. Thanks to a great client, the late President Whitney Griswold, there is as fine a collection of the best in modern architecture there as can be found anywhere.

Thanks to another great client, Mayor Lee of New Haven, the Yale student of today can also see some public buildings of the same high standing. In fact it has been said that more first rate buildings have been produced in the last five years in the City of New Haven, academic, public and private than the entire City of New York. But then Athens too was a very small place!

One of the great social forces for good design in Europe for centuries has been the Church. After a beautiful beginning

in America the standards of church design seemed to many to decline after the Civil War. Now however there is evidence all around us that many denominations are determined that their houses of worship will also be things of beauty as they have been in so many cultures over so much of history. In Boston we are particularly pleased that his Eminence Richard Cardinal Cushing has selected the eminent Dean of the Harvard School of Design, Jose Luis Sert, to prepare plans for a chapel in the Government Center Urban Renewal Area, in the heart of downtown Boston.

Our survey of social forces is of necessity cursory, but I believe it is sufficient to show that there is a vast potential waiting to be tapped. It will require much imagination, energy and persuasiveness for the most important social forces in America to become more aware of the impact that good design can have on improving the American way of life.

It may be that a non architect - an eloquent and well placed public official, a business executive who commands wide respect, or a leader in social thought - can lead us into the promised land and make Peter Blake's book obsolete, but I doubt it.

It is the architectural profession which must do this job. It is up to them to take on the responsibility of making us more aware of our environment and of teaching us how we can

make it better. I am confident that once they get a taste of such a campaign they will thrive on it. Their satisfaction will come not only from more commissions and a greater recognition of the importance of their work but in a more honored place among the learned professions. Our country and all its political and social forces pay attention to and respect those who care enough about their work to insist that the community treat it with respect and demand only the best.

I believe I know how such a movement can get started, though I freely admit I may be entirely wrong. The architects must stop talking to each other and start talking to us ignorant laymen and please in language we can understand - skip that jargon about the "new brutalism", "eclecticism", "neo-plasticism".

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Bohus, Edward J.

The impact of political and social
forces on design in America.

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